

First Territorial Capitol of Kansas  
Fort Riley Military Reservation  
Riley County  
Kansas

HABS No. KANS-15

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
450 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, California

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## "OLD TERRITORIAL CAPITOL"

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Street Address or Location: Fort Riley Military Reserve, Ft. Riley, Kansas

Present Owner: State of Kansas

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Museum

Brief Statement of Significance: This simple two story stone building served as the first capitol of the Kansas territory.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The Pawnee Town Association  
U.S. Government  
Union Pacific Railroad  
State of Kansas
2. Date of Erection: 1855 (Kansas State Historical Society, The Kansas Historical Quarterly, Summer 1957, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 Topeka, Kansas, p. 165)
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc: Warren Beekworth was in charge of the construction.
4. Original plans, construction etc: (see supplemental material Part I, D.)
5. Notes on Alterations and additions: In 1877 a windstorm tore the roof off and broke the windows. In 1907 a \$500 fund was raised to repair the walls. In 1926 \$1000 was raised for the same purpose. About 1927 the Union Pacific Historical Society spent about \$20,000 in restoration and reconstruction. This work was presented to the state of Kansas on August 1, 1928 "Huge timbers, fifty feet in length, were used in the reconstruction, the exposed surfaces being chipped by adzes to imitate hand hewn lumber. The floors are of two-inch planks with rough finish. Iron nails and dowel pins were used to hold the timbers and lumber together. Hanging lamps were installed, and old benches, stoves, and antique furniture were found to help create the atmosphere of early days. The roof alone cost more than \$2,000.00 being made of three-foot shingles, hand-split to imitate "shakes". (Whittemore, Margaret, Historic Kansas, A

Centenary Sketchbook, University of Kansas Press, Lawrence,  
1954, pp. 157.)

6. Important old views and references: The Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Photographs Division: FK2.  
R5 P Folders 1 and 2:  
1 - photo before restoration  
12 - photos before restoration - one shows the remnants of the roof timbers.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure

This building served as the first Kansas Territorial Capitol. The first legislative meeting was held here from July 2 to July 6, 1855. The pro-slavery majority unseated the free staters and adjourned to Shawnee Mission at Fairway near Kansas City (which did not exist then). The capitol building was then put to a number of uses. The lower story was used as a combination carpenter shop and lodging place. Half of the second floor was used as a residence and a bachelor's club occupied the other half.

C. Likely Sources Not yet investigated: None.

D. Supplemental Material:

1. Herald of Freedom, March 24, 1855, Lawrence, Kansas, a letter written from Pawnee on February 19, 1855 stated:

"The Pawnee Association have . . . men at work on a warehouse . . . to be built of stone. Two sawmills are about being put into operation."

2. Kansas State Historical Society, The First Capitol of Kansas, a flyer, "Warren Beckworth, who was engaged in the construction, wrote on March 9, (1855): "I have about thirty men at work on the warehouse and we are getting along very well. It will be done in time for the first session of the Legislature".
3. Squatter Sovereign, July 17, 1855, Atchison, Kansas, a letter: "On arriving at Pawnee, I must acknowledge I was disappointed in not finding more improvements, especially as Governor Reeder thought this the most eligible place for holding the session of the Legislature. The building designed for the Legislature Hall, is a large stone warehouse, which when we arrived on Saturday, had neither floor nor roof, but by working all day Sunday and Sunday night, the roof and floor was finished, but the doors were not completed while we stayed - so we had to legislate with open doors".

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

## A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: This building is a simple two story stone frontier and has little architectural merit or interest.
2. Condition of Fabric: The original stone walls are well preserved and the reconstructed parts of the building are carefully maintained.

## B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall Dimensions: About forty (40) feet by eighty (80) feet.
2. Foundations: Native limestone.
3. Wall Construction: Native limestone.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads etc.: none.
5. Chimneys: A stone chimney was located in each end wall and was topped with brick on the exterior.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Thresholds are of cut stone and the lintels are of wood. The doors are all reconstructed and are of panelled wood.
  - b. Windows and shutters: The sills are cut stone and the lintels are wood. The windows and shutters are reconstructed.

## 7/ Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with hand split shakes. The roof is entirely reconstructed.
- b. Cornice, eaves: A very simple wood cornice is used.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: None.

## C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: The first floor and second floor plans are identical, having a row of center columns and a stairway on

the south side, both areas being used as assembly halls.

2. Stairways: One reconstructed stairway exists on the south wall near the east end.
3. Flooring: A reconstructed floor has been placed in the building.
4. Walls and ceiling finish: The interior wall is white-washed and the ceiling is made up of the exposed structural members and covering.
5. Doorways and doors: No interior doors exist.
6. Trim: A very simple unpainted wood trim is utilized.
7. Hardware: No original hardware exists.
8. Lighting: No original lighting exists but hanging lanterns of the type probably used in the original building have been installed.
9. Heating: Wood stoves have been installed in the reconstruction.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: On a level site north of the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The building faces west.
2. Enclosures: None
3. Outbuildings: None
4. Walks, driveways, etc.: None
5. Landscaping, gardens, etc: Pine trees and bushes were planted during the reconstruction but they are placed too near the structure.